

Measuring host sincerity: Scale development and validation

Abstract

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to develop and validate a scale for host sincerity.

Design/methodology/approach

The 10-item host sincerity scale was developed by following a multi-stage scale development procedure (Delphi technique, qualitative interviews, and surveys).

Findings

The findings reveal that host sincerity is a second-order construct with two underlying dimensions: 'sincere social interaction' and 'sincere emotional response'. By incorporating host sincerity into the consumer-based model of authenticity, the findings established significant relationships among all constructs, confirming the predictive validity of the host sincerity construct.

Research limitations

Data was gathered from visitors to troglodyte heritage sites (Kandovan and Cappadocia). Future studies should test the newly formed sincerity scale at other cultural destinations in order to further explore the generalisability of the scale. Further, data was gathered from tourists. Future studies should consider host sincerity from a host perspective.

Practical implications

Cultural destination managers and local hosts can use this instrument as a supplementary tool in order to evaluate how sincere their hospitality offering appears to tourists.

Originality/value

This paper develops a host sincerity scale in order to explore the importance of sincere host-guest interactions, and tourists' emotional response to these interactions. It extends the consumer-based model of authenticity by drawing further attention to the importance and impact of host sincerity in stimulating memorable tourism experiences.

Keywords: Host sincerity; Scale development; Cultural consumption; Scale validation

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1. Introduction

In relative terms, extant research overlooks the notion of ‘sincerity’ and its role in stimulating visitor interest in places and their local inhabitants (Prentice and Andersen, 2007). Meanwhile, authenticity and its related concepts receive sustained attention in hospitality and tourism studies (Kolar and Žabkar, 2010), and interest in capturing and understanding what is perceived to be ‘real’ inspires research across disciplines (Beverland, 2005). Cultural places should be “both authentic and sincere, and not unnecessarily staged or superficial” (Prentice and Andersen, 2007, p.95). Here, authenticity refers to destinations and their offerings felt to be meaningful, whereas sincerity explains relationships with people perceived to be meaningful (Prentice and Andersen, 2007; Prince, 2017). Extant research emphasises two of the main concepts relating to perceived authenticity: existential and object-based authenticity (Bryce *et al.*, 2015). However, the lack of a specific measurement scale for host sincerity leaves a vital knowledge gap, and offers the opportunity for a much-needed investigation to assess the sincerity concept alongside destination authenticity’s component parts.

While the functional importance of host-guest interactions has been explored (Sharpley, 2014), host sincerity represents a more critical element of tourists’ encounters with locals (Prince, 2017). Prior studies do not reflect the importance of visitor interactions with hosts, beyond acknowledging that tourists often hold a preconceived notion of locals pre-travel (Yi *et al.*, 2017). However, the willingness of locals to interact with tourists in an accurate and meaningful fashion is important as it allows them to share their experiences, culture, and lives and quash suspicion regarding the ‘authenticity’ of a destination (Yi *et al.*, 2017), resulting in more sincere travel experiences (Taylor, 2001). This is crucial as, while destination features can be authentic, encounters with local hosts are distinct and should be evaluated based on their sincerity (Prince, 2017). The emotional response engendered by sincere host-guest interactions can impact upon tourism development (Wang *et al.*, 2015), and contributes to how authentic the travel experience is perceived to be (Walter, 2017). Given the substantial extant emphasis on place-oriented vessels of authenticity, this study focuses on this tangential, underrecognised element (Yi *et al.*, 2017), where hosts strive to provide tourists with genuine insight into their functioning lives in order to represent themselves accurately, not to take advantage of them for financial gain (Taylor, 2001).

Prior research investigates host-guest interactions and the emotional response to these interactions (Woosnam *et al.*, 2009). However, this typically emerges from the host’s, not the tourist’s, perspective (Sharpley, 2014). Given the importance of sincerity to host-guest interactions, this study seeks to advance research on the concept. In capturing this phenomena, it is crucial to adopt a comprehensive approach, and a reliable scale can address this. Thus, this study contributes to hospitality literature by presenting a rigorous process of scale development by defining, validating, predicting and understanding the importance of the concept of host sincerity (Netemeyer *et al.*, 2003). Using multi-stage scale development procedures, we echo Khan and Rahman (2017) in their call to advance scale development and measurement in this area. Therefore, we seek to:

- Develop and validate a scale for measuring ‘host sincerity’ in cultural places by conducting a sequence of inter-related studies that assess the reliability and validity of the scale (Netemeyer *et al.*, 2003)
- Test predictive validity by assessing the relationships between host sincerity and related constructs consistent with underlying theories and previous research. Here, we test the ability of the host sincerity construct “to estimate some creation behaviour that is external to the measuring instrument itself” (Hosany and Gilbert, 2010, p.519). To establish the predictive validity of host sincerity, structural equation analyses were performed with the perceived authenticity, cultural motivation and memorable tourism experience (MTE) constructs based on the consumer-based model of authenticity (CBA).

Thus, this study enhances hospitality and cultural consumption literature by providing a new host sincerity scale, further advancing understanding of related concepts in a hospitality and tourism context.

2. Literature review

2.1 Host sincerity

From an interdisciplinary perspective, sincerity is typically conceptualized around notions of honesty (Aaker, 1997); transparency (Erickson, 1995); accountability (Keane, 2002); and integrity (Austin, 1962) (**Table 1**). However, its use within the field of tourism and hospitality research has barely surpassed Taylor’s (2001) assertion that sincerity and authenticity are different but not dissimilar (Prince, 2017). While Taylor (2001) suggests that both represent ‘*real*’ representations of place, culture, and values, he extends this by stating that ‘sincere’ tourism is driven by interaction, and occurs independently of visitor presence instead of existing primarily for the benefit of tourists. This echoes Chhabra *et al.* (2003), who assert that tourist perceptions of destination authenticity can be erroneous and that it is difficult to identify whether a travel experience is authentic or staged. This is complicated further due to tourists’ increasing awareness of the impact that their presence has on destination offerings (Daugstad and Kirchengast, 2013), which can subsequently influence host behaviour and the perceived sincerity therein (Taylor, 2001).

[Table 1]

Sincere travel experiences develop through a fluid and difficult to isolate dimension – the local people and their eagerness to interact with, educate, and involve tourists in the reality of their lives (Wang *et al.*, 2015). Here, the nature of host-tourist interactions is vital (Taylor, 2001). Prentice and Andersen (2007) explored cultural tourism using three sequential stages: fieldwork, journeys-for-experiences (JFE), and celebration. In the second stage, JFE, they posit that tourists’ appreciation of cultural experiences is dominated by both felt authenticity (from the place) and sincerity sought (from local people). Unlike the experiential elements of existential authenticity (Yi *et al.*, 2017), these interactions need not be carefully curated and managed – they are natural, of the place, accurately represent local

culture and customs and, perhaps most importantly, occur irrespective of tourist presence (Taylor, 2001).

Beverland (2005) emphasises the need for genuine host passion and sense-of-place for an experience to be considered sincere and, despite its contingency on independence and autonomy, there must be genuine desire from locals to interact and share the reality of their lives with tourists (Wang *et al.*, 2015). It is here that Taylor's (2001) notion of sincerity flourishes; where an event, experience, or site has to *be* real independent of tourists rather than *appearing* to be real in order to attract and satisfy them. Here, sincerity emerges from the interactive, relationship-oriented elements of travel, where “‘authenticity’ [presents] a liminal threshold for the tourist to negotiate through sincere engagement with the host” (Deville *et al.*, 2016, p.101). Thus, while destination features are considered *authentic*, hosts should adopt a *sincere* approach to interacting with tourists in order to provide memorable travel experiences (Wang *et al.*, 2015). Thus, these sincere encounters are stimulated when the host provides an accurate representation of their life and culture (Prince, 2017), which can subsequently impact upon tourists' overall perception of their travel experience (Walter, 2017).

Given the fledgling body of research into host sincerity (Taylor, 2001; Prince, 2017), and the foundation available from ancillary disciplines (**Table 1**), the concept can thus be understood from two distinct yet symbiotic dimensions. The first stems from the host-tourist interface, where genuine social interactions lacking pretence and deceit, and accurately encapsulating the local culture and customs (Prentice and Andersen, 2007), represent a crucial component of host sincerity. This dimension, labelled '*sincere social interaction*', focuses on the way in which, and means through which, hosts provide tourists with genuine and accurate insight into their functioning lives because they *want* to, not purely to take advantage of them for financial gain (Taylor, 2001).

The second dimension, '*sincere emotional response*', stems from the feelings elicited following this interaction. While existential in nature, tourists' sincere emotional response is not necessarily concerned with fulfilment and engagement (Daugstad and Kirchengast, 2013), nor intrapersonal feelings generated from attachment to the destination or objects therein (Bryce *et al.*, 2017). It does not simply acknowledge that interactions occur (Yi *et al.*, 2017), but focuses on the emotional responses elicited within the tourist as an outcome of these interactions. Thus, host sincerity is concerned with how *sincere* tourists perceive the local people's actions, and their interactions with these hosts, to be. Therefore, for this study, 'host sincerity' is conceptualized as: when tourists feel that local hosts interact with them in an active and open manner, while accurately representing themselves in order to share the reality of their day-to-day lives.

2.2 Host sincerity and related concepts

Given the importance of object-based and existential authenticity in shaping visitors' experiences, this study draws upon the CBA (Kolar and Žabkar, 2010). While the CBA

stresses the important role that authenticity plays in a cultural tourism context (Kolar and Žabkar, 2010), this study contends that it does not sufficiently consider a key supplementary factor – the nature of, and emotional response to, sincere interactions with local hosts. These interactions contribute to how authentic tourists perceive their travel to be (Walter, 2017) and can strengthen the tangible and experiential elements of travel. The host-tourist relationship receives limited attention within the CBA (Dewille *et al.*, 2016), and there is little emphasis on the perceived sincerity of these interactions from a tourist perspective (Bryce *et al.*, 2017). With regards to cultural heritage tourism, host sincerity better represents the authentic aspects of this relationship (Prince, 2017), where sincere interactions see tourists “incorporated into certain cultural aspects of the host community” (McIntosh and Johnson, 2005, p.37). To approve the application of the scale, it is vital to recognise whether it has predictive validity by testing the relationship between host sincerity and established concepts (Netemeyer *et al.*, 2003). This involves extending the CBA (cf. Bryce *et al.*, 2015; Zhou *et al.*, 2013) by incorporating a host sincerity scale into the model. Thus, this updated model explores relationships surrounding cultural motivation, authenticity, host sincerity, and memorable tourism experiences.

While this study does not seek to contribute directly to the debate on the definition or nature of authenticity, it does focus on an important tangential aspect – host sincerity. Sincerity is often mistaken for authenticity due to the lack of congruence with regards to its exact definition and characteristics (Bryce *et al.*, 2017). Object-based authenticity describes the legitimacy and provenance of relics and artefacts (Chhabra *et al.*, 2003), and is concerned with “how people see themselves in relation to objects” (Reisinger and Steiner, 2006, p.74). This bolsters visitors’ desire to experience culturally significant places and their enthusiasm to develop an understanding of a destination through native objects ‘discovered’ there (Chhabra *et al.*, 2003). Destination-specific objects amplify visitors’ perceptions of the authenticity of travel if they meet expectations (Gursoy *et al.*, 2004). Studies have explored the role of object-based authenticity within hospitality and tourism, with emphasis on the relationship between the concept and existential authenticity (Wang, 1999), cultural motivation (Bryce *et al.*, 2015) and tourists’ attitudes and loyalty (Zhou *et al.*, 2013).

Existential authenticity refers to the object-free component of travel (Mura, 2015) and is described as a “state of being” (Rickly-Boyd, 2013, p.682). Authentic tourism relies on the convergence of destination-specific objects and tourists’ existential experiences (Rickly-Boyd, 2013). Wang (1999) argues that existential authenticity stems from the visitor’s lived experience; including physical feelings and self-making (Mura, 2015). Existentially authentic experiences are not simply about visiting sites of socially constructed significance, but participating and experiencing something fulfilling, engaging, and fundamentally dissimilar to the normality of everyday life (Daugstad and Kirchengast, 2013). Reisinger and Steiner (2006) and Kolar and Žabkar (2010) found that both existential and object-based authenticity were related to cultural motivation, while Bryce *et al.* (2015) suggest that cultural motivation positively influences existential authenticity.

Nonetheless, ‘cultural’ tourism is not a facsimile of ‘serious’ tourism, and can include more casual travel (Brida *et al.*, 2014). Extant literature identifies distinct types of cultural tourist: those curious about the culture surrounding a destination, and those who simply have an interest in experiencing something different while travelling (Richards, 2002). Kolar and Žabkar (2010, p.655) suggest that cultural motivation is a “cluster of interrelated and intellectually based interests in culture and heritage”. These extend beyond the chastely intellectual motives of cultural consumption and include more social and self-fulfilling desires, such as visiting cultural sites ‘to relax’ and have a ‘good time with friends’ (Kolar and Žabkar, 2010). Cultural travel can bolster identity and reinforce religious beliefs, expose unfamiliar ways of life, or offer something different and unusual (Collins-Kreiner, 2010; Zhang *et al.*, 2016). Cultural motivation thus influences object-based and existential authenticity through its ability to deliver the ‘push-or-pull’ factors which stimulate travel (Zhou *et al.*, 2013). Thus:

H1. Cultural motivation is positively related to object-based authenticity.

H2. Cultural motivation is positively related to existential authenticity.

Similarly, cultural motivation encourages tourists to seek sincere experiences (Taylor, 2001). The behaviour of locals can enhance travel due to the cultural exposure cultivated from the collaborative, interactive elements inherent within sincere tourism (Taylor, 2001). Visitors motivated to travel based on their interest in the cultural elements of destinations, or who have previously interacted with indigenous people, are likely to pursue sincere encounters and serve to gain the most from these interactions (McIntosh and Johnson, 2005). Further, host sincerity contributes to the overall experience for those motivated by the more interactive, as opposed to tangible, elements of cultural travel (Deville, 2016). Thus:

H3. Cultural motivation positively influences host sincerity.

The quest for authentic experiences can motivate individuals *to* travel yet can also surface *post-travel* (Brida *et al.*, 2014). While existential authenticity and object-based authenticity are distinct, both coalesce in propagating the overall authenticity of a destination. Object-based authenticity influences existential authenticity as the tourist experience is neither context nor object-free (Kolar and Žabkar, 2010), and existential authenticity is intrinsically linked to object-based authenticity because physical artefacts and relics contribute meaningfully to the experiential aspects of travel (Reisinger and Steiner, 2006). Thus:

H4. Object-based authenticity is positively related to existential authenticity.

Understanding MTE is important when exploring travel motivations, behaviours, and reflections. Memorable tourism is typically positive, most powerful post-travel (Lee, 2015), and remains in a visitor’s mind long after the exact dates of travel are forgotten (Kim *et al.*, 2012). A range of dimensions stimulate memorable tourism. For example, those driven by genuine interest in the cultural aspects of a destination are more likely to derive satisfaction

from travel (Richards, 2002). If fostered appropriately, hosts can amplify unique cultural aspects to enhance tourists' overall perception of a destination. However, Richards and Wilson (2006) warn against the misuse and commoditisation of 'culture' and the impact this can have on visitor's perception of a destination. Attempts to force 'cultural' aspects upon tourists in order to encourage travel can have the opposite effect, further emphasising the importance of authenticity in the domain of cultural consumption (Martin, 2010). Further, tourists are not a homogenous group, and the memorability of their travel varies based on their existing interests, emotions, and personal backgrounds (Kim *et al.*, 2012). For culturally motivated tourists, memorable experiences are contingent on whether the destination's tangible elements meet expectations, and are strengthened if the experiential components of travel are pronounced, particularly when socialising with others at cultural destinations (Kolar and Žabkar, 2010). Thus:

H5. Cultural motivation positively influences MTE.

Cultural tourism is *memorable* because of the insight and enjoyment it can provide (Lee, 2015). Thus, host sincerity may influence MTE (Taylor, 2001). This primarily surfaces through involvement and interaction with local culture (Lee, 2015), and the opportunity to *absorb* genuine experiences beyond the touristic norm (Taylor, 2001). Further, both existential and object-based authenticities influence MTE, as interacting with authentic artefacts and objects can live long within a visitor's mind (Lee, 2015). Similarly, the unique emotions associated with visiting destinations perceived as authentic can stimulate MTE, (Kim *et al.*, 2012). Sincere experiences contribute to the overall memorability of travel, where visitors reflect positively on sincere encounters with local people as opposed to tourism operators (Deville *et al.*, 2016), and where the integrity of hosts is contingent on how sincere their interactions are perceived to be (Wang *et al.*, 2015). Further, memorability is derived from the tourist feeling "incorporated into certain cultural aspects of the host community" (McIntosh and Johnson, 2005, p.37), where they can experience the real life of the host, but this is only possible if manifest in a sincere fashion. Thus:

H6. Host Sincerity positively impacts on MTE.

H7. Object-based authenticity positively influences MTE.

H8. Existential authenticity positively influences MTE.

Based on the review of existing literature, the conceptual framework is presented in **Figure 1**.

[Figure 1]

3. Methodology and scale development

In response to calls encouraging scale development in tourism and hospitality research (Khan and Rahman, 2017), this study followed the systematic scale development approach (Churchill, 1979; Netemeyer *et al.*, 2003) in order to develop a host sincerity scale. This included (1) content domain and item generation, (2) item purification, (3) construct

validation and reliability assessment, and (4) replication. **Figure 2** provides a graphical representation of this process.

[Figure 2]

3.1 Phase 1: Content domain and item generation

A thorough examination of the literature on host sincerity was conducted. The host sincerity concept was defined as “when tourists feel that local hosts interact with them in an active and open manner, while accurately representing themselves in order to share the reality of their day-to-day lives”. As neither a measurement scale nor conceptual model for host sincerity exists, individual and group interviews were conducted to develop items. Convenience sampling was employed to interview 43 individuals, 18-70 years old, from different international backgrounds (Europe, Asia, Middle-East, North America). These participants visited functioning troglodyte cultural heritage sites, where local hosts share their habitat and businesses with tourists during the last three years, with fresh memories of their travel (Jafari *et al.*, 2013). Interviewees were encouraged to explain their experience of interacting with locals, with themes (items) driven from their narrative (Wells *et al.*, 2016). An initial list of 26 host sincerity items was generated and the research team assessed the content adequacy of these statements with assistance from 8 faculty members and PhD students (male and female; 22-58 years old) (cf. Hosany and Gilbert, 2010). The results of the coding process were shared in order to enhance the validity and consistency of the analysis (Jafari *et al.*, 2013). Following the elicitation procedure and using thematic analysis, ambiguous statements were eliminated and items with identical meanings combined (Netemeyer *et al.*, 2003), yielding a pool of 15-items.

Next, the Delphi technique, using expert-judgment, was employed to review the 15-items and confirm face and content validity. We followed the principles of member checking approach (Netemeyer *et al.*, 2003). We consulted with a panel of 23 international business school researchers and tourism practitioners. These experts further refined item selection and ensured face validity (Khan and Rahman, 2017). We started with an open-ended questionnaire in round 1, where quantitative items were supplemented by experts’ qualitative comments. In round two, each expert received the second Delphi questionnaire and reviewed the items based on information gathered in round one. We used a panel rating approach to assess the 15-items: i) highly representative; ii) moderately representative; iii) very little representative; and iv) not at all representative. The majority were considered ‘highly representative’ (8-items), some were considered ‘moderately representative’ (2-items), and the rest were either ‘very little representative’ or ‘not at all representative’ (5-items). Thus, 5-items were redundant. These were: (1) I think the locals had some level of interaction with me; (2) When I was involved with locals, I was conscious of who they are; (3) My interactions with locals educated me on their culture; (4) I was involved with locals in their day-to-day life; (5) Locals want to be involved with visitors. Next, experts (academics and

tourism practitioners) were asked to consider the final 10-items. All agreed that they accurately defined the concept of host sincerity. Finally, we checked the mean of the items for face validity. We eliminated items that were rated by experts as having an average of 2 or lower for all 15 items. The same 5 items had mean values <2 and the final 10 items had mean values >3 (min=3.02; max=4). This consensus confirmed content validity and credibility, and 10-items were considered representative of the scale (**Table 2**).

3.2 Phase 2: Item purification

Overall, 203 domestic and international British university students, from 14 different nationalities across varying academic subjects, were used to test scale purification (Netemeyer *et al.*, 2003). Prior to administering the survey, a presentation (including pictures and videos) of functioning cultural heritage sites (e.g., Cappadocia (Turkey), Kandovan (Iran), Guadix (Spain)) was delivered to students, who were asked to assess their feelings toward these places and people on a 7-point Likert scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree).

3.3 Phase 3: Construct validation and reliability assessment

To further verify the constructs identified in Phase 2, reliability and construct validation techniques were employed to assess the scale items measuring the host sincerity construct (Taheri *et al.*, 2017). Construct validation and reliability assessment were used to test the convergent, discriminate, and predictive validity of the scale. Data was collected in Kandovan from international tourists over a four-month period in 2015. Situated in the northwest corner of Iran, Kandovan is a troglodyte village estimated at over 850 years old. The uniqueness of the village stems from the inhabited caves, created by volcanic remnants from the now-dormant Mount Sahand, carved into the landscape. Today, the village covers an area of 150-hectares, with 650 inhabitants (Yahyavi and Shaghaghi, 2012).

Using convenience sampling, international tourists were randomly approached prior to leaving the village, where they were administered the English language questionnaire by trained researchers. The questionnaire was pilot tested with 50 respondents (omitted from final sample) over 14-days. The final questionnaires were administered by trained field workers who targeted tourists in Kandovan for an average of 6 hours per day. We collected 518 useable questionnaires. Within the conceptual framework, all multi-item reflective scales were adapted from previous scales. Respondents rated each statement on a Likert-scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). The respondents self-reported on 9-items for cultural motivation, adapted from Kolar and Žabkar (2010). The existential authenticity (6-item) and object-based authenticity (4-item) scales were developed from Zhou *et al.* (2015). Finally, a 5-item MTE-scale was measured based on Lee (2015) (**Appendix 1**).

3.4 Phase 4: Replication

The generalisability of the model was tested with tourists who visited Cappadocia; a UNESCO World Heritage Site located in South-Central Turkey. As with Kandovan, Cappadocia's distinctiveness lies in the convergence of natural and man-made landmarks, where the volcanic landscape is littered with inhabited cave-dwellings and underground chambers (Erdogan and Tosun, 2009). Both sites have undergone rapid development, and each offers tourists the opportunity to experience a functioning example of troglodyte architecture couched within the natural beauty of the region (Erdogan and Tosun, 2009). As with Phase 3, trained researchers administered the English language questionnaire to international visitors in Cappadocia for an average of 6 hours per day. Respondents were approached randomly prior to leaving the village. A total of 627 responses were collected.

4. Results

4.1 Results of phase 2: Item purification

The sample was 46.8% male, 33.2% female. To purify the scale, we examined corrected item-to-total correlations for all statements (Netemeyer *et al.*, 2003). Items with low or no correlation ($r < 0.4$) should be eliminated. Results indicate that no items were poorly correlated with the total score, thus all 10 were retained. The principal component analysis (PCA), with Promax rotation and unrestricted number of factors, was used as we expected the factors to be correlated (Hair *et al.*, 2010). The lowest correlation is 0.467, thus Promax was appropriate. The sample size (>200 participants) is appropriate for PCA (Hair *et al.*, 2010). The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity were calculated to assess sampling appropriateness. KMO was 0.946 (>0.5) and the Chi-square value for Bartlett's Test Sphericity was significant ($\chi^2=4926.927$; $p < 0.001$). Consequently, both exceeded the recommended threshold and the data is suitable for PCA. A final two-factor model was extracted, accounting for 81.550% of the total variance. The items included factor 1 (*sincere social interaction*) and factor 2 (*sincere emotional response*) (**Table 2**). Cronbach's α also exceeded the cut-off value of 0.70 for both factors (**Table 2**). Finally, we established multicollinearity by employing variance inflation factor (VIF) and the tolerance test. VIF values were below the threshold (3) and tolerance test < 0.33 (Hair *et al.*, 2010). Hence, multicollinearity was not a concern for this study.

[Table 2]

4.2 Results of phase 3: Construct validation and reliability assessment

Prior to assessing construct validity, we tested for non-response bias. Early and late versions of the questionnaire were compared for any systematic difference in socio-demographic attributes and nationality. No significant difference was detected between these groups. Males represented 59.1% of the sample and most respondents travelled for leisure. With regards to nationality, 34.6% were European, 35.3% from Asia and the rest from

Middle-East (25.1%). Of the participants, 28% were 46 or older, 52.8% were 26-45, and 19.2% were 18-25 years old. Additionally, the occurrence of Common Method Variance (CMV) was tested. Tourists were informed that their answers remained anonymous, minimizing social desirability bias. Independent and dependent scales were placed in different areas of the questionnaire. Harman's single-factor test was employed to test CMV by entering all principal scales into a PCA (Podsakoff *et al.*, 2003). The eigenvalue unrotated PCA solution detected 7 factors, and the largest percentage of variance explained by one single factor was 35.294%. We also used the unmeasured method factor approach to further examine for CMV. Following Liang *et al.*'s (2007) recommendation for partial least squares structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM), a common method factor was presented to the structural model. We calculated method factor and average variance of indicators. The average variance illustrated by items was 56%, whereas the average method-based variance was 1.7% (32:1). Thus, CMV is not a concern for the research.

To confirm the host sincerity dimensionality and assessing the factor structures, we performed confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) using maximum likelihood method in IBM AMOS 23.0. We calculated a 2-factor model structure and compared it with a 1-factor model. The goodness-of-fit results demonstrate the 2-factor model has better model-fit indexes (CMIN/DF=5.32; NFI=0.958; CFI=0.921; IFI=0.932; TLI=0.932; RMSEA=0.07) compared to the 1-factor model (CMIN/DF=8.73; NFI=0.732; CFI= 0.801; IFI=0.763; TLI=0.652; RMSEA= 0.125) (Hair *et al.* 2010). Cronbach's α and VIF exceed recommended standards (**Table 2**), and average variance extracted (AVE) was >0.50. Thus, all items remained for further testing.

To test reliability, construct validity, and predictive validity, PLS-SEM was used. PLS-SEM has been applied in hospitality and tourism studies (Wells *et al.*, 2016) and is suitable for early-stage theory building with construct(s) yet to receive appropriate empirical attention. It can test reflective, formative and higher-order models (Hair *et al.*, 2017). Finally, PLS-SEM is also suitable for both normal and non-normal distributional properties (Hair *et al.*, 2017). Tests of Skewness and Kurtosis were assessed. The findings indicated that the assumption of normality was desecrated for some items in cultural motivation, object-based authenticity and MTE (Wells *et al.*, 2016). The measurement and structural model were examined within SmartPLS 3.0. The non-parametric bootstrapping technique was assessed with 518 cases, 5000 resamples (Hair *et al.*, 2017). For the measurement model including our constructs in the conceptual framework, composite reliability (CR), Cronbach's α , factor loadings and AVE were used to assess convergent validity.

For all constructs, the CR and Cronbach's α exceeded the threshold of 0.7 (Hair *et al.*, 2010). The AVE and factor loadings surpassed the threshold (0.5) for all reflective constructs (Hair *et al.*, 2010) (**Table 3**). Discriminant validity was tested using (1) Fornell and Larcker's (1981) criterion, which entails a scale's AVE to exceed the square of its largest correlation with any scale (**Table 3**), and (2) heterotrait-monotrait ratio of correlations (HTMT). Henseler *et al.* (2015) argues that HTMT indicates greater presentation by means of a Monte Carlo simulation compared to Fornell-Larcker's approach. Here, if the HTMT value is <0.85, discriminant validity must be documented between scales. Construct HTMT values ranged

from 0.431-0.744. Second, the $HTMT_{inference}$ criterion was assessed using complete bootstrapping to check whether HTMT significantly differs from 1. $HTMT_{inference}$ indicated that all HTMT values differ significantly from 1 (0.612-0.856). Therefore, discriminate validity was established.

[Table 3]

We confirmed the dimensionality of host sincerity through PCA and CFA. To further test the second-order factor structure, we used repeated measures to estimate the hierarchical component models (HCMs) in PLS-SEM (Becker *et al.*, 2012). The relationships between the second-order host sincerity and two underlying first-order factors (i.e., weights) were significant, and R^2 values surpassed the recommended value of 0.5 (**Table 4**). Thus, host sincerity is a second-order construct represented by two first-order factors. Additionally, Kline (2011) suggests that an invariance assessment shows whether the bulk of items evaluate the same variables among different groups, consequently improving measurement model validity. A Chi-square statistic was employed to test two groups' invariance for gender. The findings demonstrate that Chi-square differences among males and females were not significant, indicating that the measurement model was suitable (Difference: $\chi^2=72.657$, $p=0.217$). Moreover, a meta-analytic approach was employed to test external validity (Wanous and Reichers, 1999). Using non-parametric Spearman's rank correlation test, the correlation between an ordinal global 'host sincerity' item and other ordinal sincerity items was tested. The global item was: 'In my opinion, sincere hospitality is when I feel that I am experiencing the real lives of local people when interacting with them'. Following thorough investigation of extant literature, the research team developed the global statement. We returned to our experts (Phase 1) for their opinion regarding this item. Finally, we sought advice from colleagues experienced in scale development. All agreed that this item summarizes the spirit of the host sincerity scale. The results demonstrate significant, positive correlations between each indicator and the global item (**Table 5**).

[Table 4]

[Table 5]

Moreover, Stone-Geisser's Q^2 value calculated the criterion of predictive relevance (Hair *et al.*, 2017). A Q^2 value >0 indicates that the model has predictive relevance (**Table 3**). Goodness-of-fit (GoF) index was tested using procedures from Wetzels *et al.* (2009). GoF surpassed the recommended value, indicating very good model-fit. SRMR was also used to indicate fit ($SRMR < 0.08$) (Taheri *et al.*, 2017). GoF and SRMR exceeded the recommended values (**Table 3**). Cohen's effect size (f^2) was also tested. Here, the significant relationships in the inner model should exceed 0.02, indicating satisfactory properties for the endogenous latent constructs (Hair *et al.*, 2017). The results show that f^2 for the inner model was >0.02 . Therefore there is a satisfactory effect for latent constructs (**Table 6**). The model explains 51% of MTE, 44% of object-based authenticity, 48% of existential authenticity and 24% of host sincerity. All direct paths were in the hypothesised direction, indicating the predicative validity of the host sincerity construct (**Table 6**) (Netemeyer *et al.*, 2003).

[Table 6]

4.3 Results of Phase 4: Replication

Imitating Phase 3, we checked for non-response bias. No significant difference was detected between age, gender and nationality in early and late versions of the questionnaire. From our sample, 62% were female and the majority travelled for leisure purposes. With regards to nationality, 48% were European, 31.2% from Asia and the remainder from Middle-East (28.8%). With regards to age, 32% were 46 or older, 41.8% were 26-45, and 26.2% were 18-25 years old. PLS-SEM was employed to test for CFA and for assessing predictive validity. The existence of CMV was examined in various ways. Tourists were informed that their responses would remain anonymous. Harman's single-factor test was assessed by entering all principal scales into a PCA (Podsakoff *et al.*, 2003). The eigenvalue unrotated PCA solution detected 7 factors, and the largest portion of variance explained by one single factor was 42.120%. Similarly, we used Liang *et al.*'s (2007) unmeasured method factor design. The average variance illustrated by indicators was 63%, whereas the average method-based variance was 1.6% (39:1). Therefore, CMV is not a concern for this study.

Using PLS-SEM, **Table 3, 4 and 5** demonstrate the reliability and validity of measurement model. GoF, SRMR and f^2 surpassed the recommended threshold. HTMT values ranged from 0.520-0.678. HTMT_{inference} were significantly different from 1 (0.589-0.701). The model explains 44% of MTE, 53% of object-based authenticity, 61% of existential authenticity, and 37% of sincerity. Nomological and predictive validity were supported as the hypothesised relationships between host sincerity and other related constructs were significant (**Table 6**). Thus, Phase 4 substantiates the predictive, convergent, and discriminant validity of the second-order host sincerity construct and its cross-cultural similarity.

5. Discussion and Conclusions

This study examines an often-overlooked aspect of the travel experience – tourists' genuine interactions with local hosts. This vital to what Taylor (2001) considers as 'sincere' tourism and hospitality, and presents a more realistic representation of both the destination and culture of those who live and work there; an experience increasingly pursued by tourists. Thus, this research replied to the need for a new scale to measure the concept of 'host sincerity'. To achieve this, it followed the multi-step mixed method scale development procedure (Netemeyer *et al.*, 2003). The host sincerity construct has been tested and validated using a sample of international visitors to Kandovan and Cappadocia, and can be employed as a research instrument in future studies aiming to assess host sincerity in the hospitality field. As no previous study has been conducted on the development of a host sincerity scale, this research serves as the first empirical evaluation of the concept, significantly contributing to both theory and practice.

5.1 Theoretical implications

The PCA generated two factors that were grouped and labeled as ‘sincere social interaction’ and ‘sincere emotional response’, accounting for 81.550% of the total variance. Using data from Kandovan and Cappadocia, the second-order ‘host sincerity’ construct with two underlying dimensions developed within this study contributes to theory, method, and practice. The results suggest that tourists believe that functioning cultural heritage sites provide significant opportunities for sincere social interaction and emotional responses. Further, the results demonstrate that two dimensions are successfully grouped under the term ‘host sincerity’. This study does not contend that these dimensions are wholly ignored in previous studies; both have been alluded to in tourism and hospitality literature (Taylor, 2001; Yi *et al.*, 2017). Nevertheless, we believe that by precisely defining and subsequently assessing the influence of these two dimensions, this study contributes to the growing body of knowledge on both cultural consumption and general hospitality.

Further, this study extends the CBA (Kolar and Žabkar, 2010) by incorporating the host sincerity concept into the existing model. By examining host sincerity, authenticity and MTE at functioning cultural heritage sites, the data verified that all projected hypotheses were supported. Cultural motivation directly and positively influences host sincerity (H1), object-based authenticity (H2) and existential authenticity (H3), confirming extant literature (Bryce *et al.*, 2015; Deville *et al.*, 2016; Taylor, 2001). Object-based authenticity positively influences existential authenticity (H4), supporting previous studies (Bryce *et al.*, 2015; Chhabra *et al.*, 2003). Cultural motivation impacts positively on MTE, again supporting prior research (Kolar and Žabkar, 2010; Kim *et al.*, 2012). Equally supportive of extant literature are the relationships between host sincerity (H6), object-based authenticity (H7) and existential authenticity (H8) (cf. Deville *et al.*, 2016; Kim *et al.*, 2012; Lee, 2015; Wang *et al.*, 2015). Further, object-based and existential authenticity consider how tourists perceive themselves with respect to the destination, artefacts contained therein, and feelings elicited by both *place* and *objects* (Kolar and Žabkar, 2010). However, this study distinguishes host sincerity from authenticity by highlighting the under-recognized importance of genuine host-guest interactions and the subsequent emotional response generated from these interactions. In doing so, we introduce the concept of host sincerity with two underlying dimensions: sincere social interaction and sincere emotional response. This scale provides a basis for extending theoretical understanding of host sincerity within an extended CBA model (significantly influenced by cultural motivation and its impact on MTE) within the hospitality field. This also ensured the predictive validity of the scale.

5.2 Practical implications

Hosts at functioning cultural heritage sites should regularly assess whether they provide visitors with sincere and memorable tourism experiences. Cultural consumers’ visit destinations based on whether they believe they will encounter an authentic and sincere experience with regards to both content and context. Thus, cultural heritage managers (and locals) can use the newly developed host sincerity scale as a tool to optimize their

performance and evaluate whether their offerings are truly authentic and sincere. This study extends the CBA (Kolar and Žabkar, 2010) by promoting the measurement of host sincerity in a hospitality and tourism context, and establishes a link between relevant variables. In practice, policy makers and destination marketers could use this scale as a diagnostic tool to identify the predictive power of cultural motivation on tourist perceptions of authenticity, host sincerity, and subsequent memorable outcomes. Here, managers can gain knowledge of the effect of host sincerity on destination performance through understanding tourists' expectations regarding their encounters with local hosts. They should develop their business strategy in order to provide opportunities for sincere host-guest interactions to materialise. By embracing this strategy, concerns about tourists' exposure to sincere social interactions and emotional responses can be minimised, which in turn may increase the memorability of a destination's offering. Further, managers can appeal to visitors' desire for sincere interactions with locals by incorporating images representing previous host-guest encounters into their promotional materials in order further to encourage travel.

Understanding the influence and importance of host sincerity can impact upon local communities in cultural destinations, where the approach of staging perceived authentic aspects for short-term gain should be replaced by presenting a more accurate representation of locals' lives and routines through genuine and accurate interactions. To encourage host sincerity, destination managers should focus on both dimensions representing the host sincerity construct by embracing mechanisms, such as workshops or training days, to educate locals on the importance of this interactive element of hospitality and the benefit of being considered sincere hosts by tourists. This could result in a more memorable experience for tourists, who are less likely to feel exploited and are perhaps more likely to return to the same destination or influence others to visit through positive word-of-mouth recommendations (Gannon *et al.*, 2017).

5.3 Limitations and Future Research

As with all scholarly inquiry this study is not without limitations, and these subsequently provide opportunities for future research. First, a scale development approach employing interviews, Delphi technique, and two stages of questionnaire was followed (Taheri *et al.*, 2017). However, the scale was restricted to tourists visiting functioning cultural heritage sites. Future studies must assess the host sincerity scale cross-culturally to further establish external validity. Similarly, future studies could adopt a longitudinal design to minimise potential generalisability biases and attain more robust findings. Further, while drawing from a previously established study, CMV and a correlation matrix were used to explore relationships between constructs and to overcome potential causality problems. However, causality is complex and contested, and colleagues should test the newly developed host sincerity scale in alternative settings. Colleagues may wish to determine the influence of contextual factors (e.g., demographic variables and situational constructs) using the extended CBA model, and could further contribute by exploring the concept of host sincerity from a host perspective.

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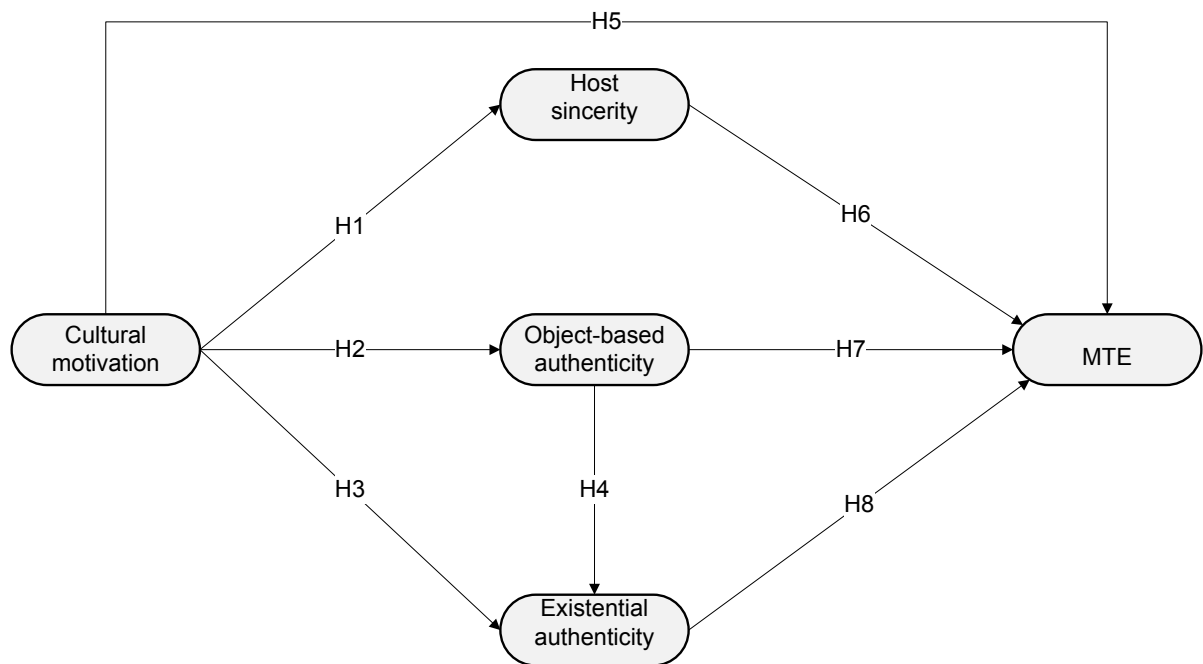
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Table 1. Multidisciplinary definitions of sincerity

Source	Discipline	Explanation	See Also
Keane (2002)	Anthropology	“public accountability to others for one's words with reference to one's self” (p.75)	Dattatreyan (2014)
Austin (1962)	Linguistics	<i>Speech act theory</i> : speeches are only sincere if the psychological state in which they are expressed reflects that state (e.g. an apology <i>showing</i> regret)	Emike (2013)
Trilling (1972)	Philosophy	“The absence of dissimulation, feigning or pretence” (p.13)	Bialystok (2011)
Aaker (1997)	Marketing	A dimension of brand personality comprised of four facets: being ‘down to earth’, ‘honest’, ‘wholesome’, and ‘cheerful’.	Arora and Stoner (2009)
Erickson (1995)	Sociology	“whether one’s ‘real’ thoughts and feelings are the same as those one expresses outwardly” (p.123)	Caza <i>et al.</i> (2015)

**Figure 1.** Main hypotheses proposed model

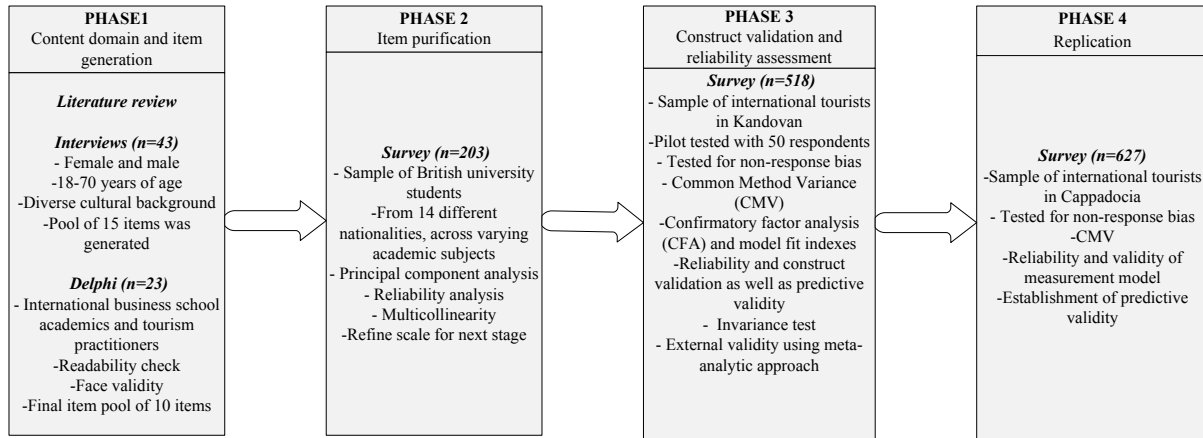


Figure 2. Scale development process.

Table 2. PCA results (Phase 2)

Item and description	Factor 1	Factor 2
<i>Sincere social interaction</i>		
S1: My interactions with local hosts help to reinforce my understanding of the place	0.695	0.132
S2: Local hosts are eager to educate me with regards to their culture	0.820	0.106
S3: I talk and interact with local hosts about their real and true culture	0.766	0.147
S4: Local hosts are happy to involve me in their real lives	0.667	0.262
S5: Local hosts are comfortable showing me their culture	0.772	0.186
<i>Sincere emotional response</i>		
S6: It is important that I see the real lives of local hosts	0.160	0.860
S7: When I see local hosts, I am conscious of their role within the place	0.232	0.801
S8: Local hosts present themselves to tourists/guests accurately and honestly	0.195	0.733
S9: There are similarities between what I see and my expectations of local hosts	0.125	0.735
S10: Local hosts represent themselves truthfully and passionately to tourists/guests	0.277	0.771
Eigenvalues	5.820	6.586
% of variance explained	12.353	12.911
Cronbach's α	0.781	0.774

Table 3. Assessment of reliability and validity

Scale	Range loadings*	of α	CR	AVE	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	Mean	SD	Q ²	SRMR	GoF
<i>Phase 3</i>														0.063	0.487
(1)Cultural motivation	0.705–0.802	0.848	0.901	0.556	0.745						4.66	1.225	n/a		
(2)Sincere emotional response	0.705–0.766	0.781	0.891	0.563	0.578	0.750					4.45	1.292	0.123		
(3)Sincere social interaction	0.701–0.777	0.763	0.791	0.565	0.500	0.504	0.751				5.09	1.197	0.181		
(4)Existential authenticity	0.722–0.760	0.783	0.807	0.589	0.502	0.591	0.358	0.767			3.92	1.478	0.362		
(5)Object-based authenticity	0.710–0.752	0.742	0.789	0.635	0.573	0.593	0.540	0.460	0.796		5.28	1.016	0.447		
(6)MTE	0.707–0.796	0.851	0.739	0.508	0.439	0.556	0.319	0.519	0.421	0.712	4.66	1.257	0.233		
<i>Phase 4</i>														0.068	0.550
(1)Cultural motivation	0.775–0.811	0.723	0.844	0.512	0.715						4.23	1.456	n/a		
(2)Sincere emotional response	0.721–0.839	0.804	0.815	0.671	0.512	0.819					5.20	1.221	0.171		
(3)Sincere social interaction	0.70–0.778	0.733	0.888	0.579	0.578	0.518	0.760				5.23	1.233	0.203		
(4)Existential authenticity	0.757–0.777	0.712	0.823	0.623	0.401	0.510	0.312	0.789			5.37	1.119	0.311		
(5)Object-based authenticity	0.717–0.839	0.823	0.876	0.684	0.513	0.523	0.523	0.490	0.827		4.33	1.423	0.542		
(6)MTE	0.704–0.779	0.777	0.811	0.666	0.337	0.519	0.387	0.529	0.437	0.816	5.01	1.134	0.198		

Table 4. Assessment of first-order constructs

Second-order construct host sincerity	First-order constructs	Weight	<i>t</i> -value	R ²
<i>Phase 3</i>				
	Sincere social interaction	0.818	7.901*	0.872
	Sincere emotional response	0.802	12.010*	0.719
<i>Phase 4</i>				
	Sincere social interaction	0.795	8.901*	0.607
	Sincere emotional response	0.780	7.092*	0.707

Notes: * $p < 0.001$

Table 5. Spearman's rank correlation

Items	Spearman's rank correlation coefficient	
	<i>Phase3*</i>	<i>Phase4*</i>
S1	0.171	0.221
S2	0.211	0.167
S3	0.223	0.239
S4	0.452	0.412
S5	0.343	0.321
S6	0.414	0.289
S7	0.382	0.211
S8	0.422	0.478
S9	0.219	0.378
S10	0.118	0.481

Note: * $p < 0.001$.

Table 6. Results of hypotheses testing

Hypotheses	β	<i>t</i> -value*	f^2
<i>Phase 3</i>			
H2	0.141	7.528	0.112
H3	0.148	5.266	0.070
H1	0.172	9.729	0.098
H4	0.118	8.686	0.116
H5	0.154	6.629	0.117
H6	0.267	7.277	0.091
H7	0.336	12.098	0.071
H8	0.303	14.111	0.080
<i>Phase 4</i>			
H2	0.201	5.777	0.117
H3	0.188	9.901	0.082
H1	0.181	7.901	0.112
H4	0.166	6.808	0.116
H5	0.289	9.119	0.123
H6	0.391	15.901	0.146
H7	0.389	12.990	0.137
H8	0.298	12.027	0.096

Notes: * $p < 0.001$.

Appendix 1: Constructs and their underlying items

Constructs/Associated items

Cultural motivation

I visit X to relax mentally
I visit X to discover new places and things
I visit X to be in a calm atmosphere
I visit X to increase my knowledge
I visit X to have a good time with friends or alone
I visit X because I am interested cultural attractions
I visit X because I am interested historical attractions
I visit X because I am interested in history
I visit X for heritage

Object-based authenticity

The overall architecture and impression of X inspired me.
I liked the peculiarities about the design, stone-made furnishings and caves.
I liked the way the site blends with the attractive landscape/scenery/village, which offers many other interesting places for sightseeing.
I liked the information about the site and found it interesting.

Existential authenticity

I liked special arrangements, events, celebrations connected to the site.
This visit provided a thorough insight into the specific historical era.
During the visit I felt the related history, legends and historical personalities.
I enjoyed the unique spiritual experience.
I liked the calm and peaceful atmosphere during the visit.
I felt connected with human history and civilization.

MTE

I enjoyed this experience and feel excited.
I closely experienced the local culture.
I enjoyed a sense of freedom.
I did something meaningful.
I gained a lot of knowledge about this culture and heritage site.
